

Chapter 6

Ground Zero

Something keeps popping up every so often in these scriptures pertaining to God's relationship with Israel, but I've been purposely avoiding the subject. Did you catch it? The *land*. What's up with that? Yahweh created the entire universe. What does he need with land—especially a tiny strip of semi-desert on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean with few known natural resources, too rocky to farm without intense labor, perennially short of water, and surrounded by people who hate Him? Why on earth does God love this land? *Canada* I could believe; not Canaan!

On the other hand, why does he love *us*? On our own, we're pretty worthless too, more a part of the problem than we are of the solution. A few years on this insignificant rock and we go the way of the dodo. Why does God bother with us? Amazingly, it's because *we* are the whole point—beings formed in *His* image, made specifically to be companions for our Creator.

Remember, we were once “better” than we are now, immortal and sinless, and one day we will be restored to this state (actually, something even better). In the same way, there is evidence that the land of Israel was once much more than the barren, rocky semi-wasteland we see today, punctuated here and there by gardens wrested from the land with Herculean effort on the part of the Jews. At the time of the exodus, Canaan was apparently lush, fertile, and well watered. The spies Moses sent in came back with a cluster of grapes so big it had to be carried on a pole between two of them. The place was described by two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, as “**an exceedingly good land. If Yahweh delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey.**” (Numbers 14:7-8)

God had His eye on this land long before the exodus, of course. When he told Abram to “Get out of your country [Ur, probably in the southern Euphrates river valley], from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you,” He knew exactly where He wanted Abe to go. We pick up the story in Genesis 12: “**So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’**” (Genesis 12:5-7) Note that God didn't say Abram himself would be given the land, but his descendants (of whom he had none at the time) would. All Abe actually ended up “owning” of it was a burial plot he bought from the Hittites.

“**And Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all**

the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.” (Genesis 13:14-17) I find it touching that Yahweh wanted Abram to personally experience the whole thing. It’s like a doting father—not satisfied with seeing his boy opening his birthday gift, but wanting to show him all the features, how it’s built, what it does. It just screams, “I love you!”

Later, He provided more specifics: “Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.’” (Genesis 15:18-20) Unfortunately, we don’t know the precise locations of all of these tribes. Canaan lent its name to the whole region, but the tribe was strongest along the coastal plain. The Hittites’ huge empire was centered far to the north, in modern Turkey. Thus, it’s probable that not all Hittite lands would be Abram’s, but only their colonies in the Levant. The reference to the Euphrates places Abram’s promised north-eastern border in today’s northern Syria, where the Hittites were particularly strong. (The Euphrates’ actual headwaters, however, are in east-central Turkey—the heart of the Hittite empire.) It’s hard to say exactly where the Hittites were in Abram’s day, or precisely what Yahweh meant, but we should note that the burial cave he bought from Ephron the Hittite was about 15 miles southwest of Hebron, midway between the Med and Dead seas.

The Rephaim were located in today’s southern Syria, east of the Sea of Galilee, including the land known as the Golan Heights. The Jebusites’ capital was Jebus, or Jerusalem. South of that, i.e., west of the Dead Sea, were the Perizzites. And the Amorites occupied, at the time, the Valley of Siddim, south of them. So at the very least, we can identify a territory far larger than modern-day Israel, one including all of Lebanon and a chunk of western Syria, but not Jordan. To the east of the Jordan River, south of the Rephaim, lived the Zuzites, Emities, and Horites. Since these nations were not on Abram’s list, we can deduce that the river was meant to be the eastern border.

The Kenezites are a hard one to figure out. The Kenizzites (with an *i*) were an Edomite tribe, apparently neighbors of the Horites to the west, i.e., south of the Dead Sea. But at this point there were no such people as Edomites (descendants of Abraham’s grandson Esau), and there is no record of an earlier patriarch whose name suggests a connection with the Kenezites. The Kenites were a Midianite tribe, thus possibly (SF8) located south and east of the Gulf of Aqaba—the north-western tip of present-day Saudi Arabia. The Kadmonites are a mystery. The

name (*qadmoni*) simply means “eastern.” The Genesis 15 passage is the only time the name is used as a tribal entity.

The “river of Egypt” is often assumed to be the Nile, but it’s not. There was another river, about fifty miles down the coast from Gaza (entering the Mediterranean at its southeast corner) known as the river, or brook, of Egypt. Today it’s called the Wadi el-Arish; it’s a dry wash for much of the year. Some commentators have protested that the word for “river” (Hebrew: *Nahar*) means a real, flowing river, not a wadi. However, we must remember that in Abram’s day the climate in the region was quite different than it is today—the brook of Egypt likely flowed all year round. Besides, God called the Euphrates “great,” and it is, but not overly so when compared to the mighty Nile. Abram had seen and crossed both great rivers by this time (see Genesis 12), so it was clear that the “great river” was indeed the Euphrates and the “river of Egypt” was something less “great”—today’s Wadi el-Arish. Another point: the Amalekites, who lived just south of the brook of Egypt, were not included in the list of territories Abram was promised.

That covenant, by the way, was serious stuff. Normally, if two parties were striking a bargain, they would each remove a sandal and exchange them. That was the rough equivalent to “shaking hands on it.” But this was a covenant of blood: sacrificial animals were split in two and both parties would walk between the pieces, as if to say, “If I do not keep my end of the bargain, may I be cut in two like this.” But Yahweh put Abram out cold and went alone between the halves of the sacrificial animals, making this a unilateral covenant; Abram had no conditions whatsoever placed upon him.

Later, lest Abram (now Abraham) should think this deal had an expiration date on it, Yahweh told him, **“I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”** (Genesis 17:8) That, of course, reinforced God’s promise to preserve the nation. They couldn’t very well possess the land of Canaan if they were extinct.

Interestingly, the “non-Jewish” branches of the family began to settle outside the land of promise. Lot’s descendants (related to Abraham but not in the line of promise) became the nations of Moab and Ammon, moving due east of the Dead sea (today’s Jordan). Ishmael settled in the wilderness of Paran, far to the south in the middle of the Sinai Peninsula. And what about Esau, Abraham’s grandson? **“Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom.**

(Genesis 36:6-8) Edom is located south and east of the Dead Sea, also in present-day Jordan—and outside the promised land.

It is tempting to explain away the tiny borders of present-day Israel by saying the promise applied to *all* of Abraham's descendents: including Ishmael, father of the Arabs, and the sons of Keturah, Abe's second wife. That theory won't hold water, however. The definition of his borders did not cease with Abraham, but was reiterated by Yahweh in successive generations, ruling out their application to anyone but the Jews.

Not surprisingly, God gave instructions on the subject to Moses right after the exodus, for he was supposed to lead his people into the promised land. The description, though, seems at first to be rather vague: **“And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.”** (Exodus 23:31)

Today, Israel's southern tip touches a hundred-mile long extension of the Red Sea called the Gulf of Aqaba. (This is the body of water referred to as the “Red Sea” in the story of the Exodus—underwater archaeologists have discovered Pharaoh's chariots strewn across the bottom like broken toys.) But the reference to Kenites above might (SF8) indicate that God really *did* mean “the Red Sea” proper, including the entire eastern shore of the Gulf—Saudi Arabia's northwest corner today (the place where Mount Sinai is *actually* located). Arguing against this theory, though, is the fact that the Midianites who lived there in Abraham's day were not specifically included in the list of nations his family would displace.

By the way, the liberals can't have it both ways. If, as they say, Moses merely parted the “Reed” sea, a foot-deep marsh on the northern end of the Gulf of Suez (miraculously drowning Pharaoh's entire army in this insignificant puddle), then according to the formula above, the Israelites were only being promised the Sinai Peninsula, west of today's Suez Canal. And if, as some would say, the “River” here meant the Nile (and not the Euphrates, as is blatantly stated in Deuteronomy 1:7 and elsewhere), then the promised land didn't come anywhere near Canaan (something that's specifically spelled out in scores of other places), but was comprised entirely of the very land in which they'd been slaves for the past four hundred years, the Land of Goshen in northeastern Egypt. Lesson: if you're willing to play fast and loose with the plain meaning of the Hebrew text, be prepared to do a constant juggling act with the rest of the Bible. The Red Sea is *not* the Reed Sea.

The sea of the Philistines is obviously the Mediterranean, for Philistia was located along its southwest shoreline—today’s Gaza strip, more or less. “The River,” based on numerous other passages, is clearly the Euphrates. A quick look at the map reveals that the Euphrates actually comes within a hundred miles of the Mediterranean coast at about the 36th parallel (approximately the latitude of Antioch). I believe (SF1) the borders of the promised land were supposed to extend that far north, and as far south as the Gulf of Aqaba. That leaves only “the desert” undefined. At issue here is how far east along the Euphrates the promised land’s border went before it turned south. Today much of Syria, Jordan, and Iraq are desert areas. We have no idea what the land was like in Moses’ day, but the Euphrates river valley wasn’t called the fertile crescent for nothing. My guess, however, is that Yahweh’s intention was to go no further east than present-day Lake al-Assad, the river’s westernmost point. But I could be wrong: it could easily include the entire western half of modern Syria; the Anti-Lebanon Mountains form a natural barrier to moisture blowing in from the Mediterranean, creating desert behind them.

Lest there should be any misunderstanding, after forty years of wilderness wanderings Yahweh again told Moses what the promised land included: **“You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn [northeast] and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites [southwest of the Dead Sea], to all the neighboring places in the plain [here He restates the overall objective], in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.”** (Deuteronomy 1:6-8)

Significantly, He also told them where *not* to go: **“You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir [south and east of the Dead Sea] to Esau as a possession... Do not harass Moab [east of the Dead Sea], nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession... And when you come near the people of Ammon [east of the Dead Sea, north of Moab], do not harass them or meddle with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot as a possession.”** (Deuteronomy 2:4-5, 9, 19) I think we can safely say that Jordan (whose capital is still called Amman) was clearly out of bounds to Jewish settlement. The reason Yahweh was so careful to point this out was that Mount Seir, Moab, Ar, and Ammon were not slated for destruction as the Canaanites were for their abominable religious practices. (That state of affairs will change drastically during the last days, by the way.) But the Israelites had to pass through

these territories to enter the land from the Jordan River side. This passage makes it painfully clear that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh were in clear violation of the will of Yahweh when they insisted on settling in Ammonite territory east of the Jordan. God didn't give them this land; they simply took it.

That little observation makes the next passage sting a bit. **“For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then Yahweh will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory.”** (Deuteronomy 11:22-24) That's a really big *if*. God had told them precisely what land to occupy, but they (some of them) presumed they knew better than Yahweh. This is all too reminiscent of the attitude of our politicians today, who totally ignore the dictates of God in the matter of Israel's proper borderline, inventing instead a politically correct but scripturally *incorrect* “road map to peace,” intending to carve Israel up into an anorexic and indefensible scrap of Swiss cheese.

But excuse my rant. We were talking about history. The consequences of the geographic disobedience of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, if nothing else, make this whole study really confusing. Obviously the map of Israel today, even if you include the West Bank, looks nothing like what is being described here. There is a huge discrepancy between what God promised and what they got.

Does this make Yahweh a liar? No. The Israelites' ownership of the land was unconditional, but their possession of it was always predicated on their obedience—and they had *always* had a problem with obedience. Remember the twelve spies? God had told the people umpteen times, “Go in and possess the land; I've given it to you.” Instead, they sent in twelve guys to check the place out first (cf. Deuteronomy 1:21-25). You know the story: they came back after forty days and ten of them said the job was too tough. Bottom line—the Israelites all died off wandering around in the desert. But hidden in the minutiae is a telling little statistic: **“So they [the twelve spies] went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath.** (Numbers 13:21) So what? They started where the people were camped, in the Wilderness of Zin, went to Hamath (or, more properly, *Lebo* Hamath, the entrance of the valley leading northward to it), turned around and came back, telling horror stories of giants armed to the teeth and a land that “devours its people.” Note that they didn't go south first to the Red Sea, or even to the Gulf of Aqaba (considered part of the Red Sea at the time); nor did they go all the way to the Euphrates River, but stopped a hundred miles short of it. That betrayed a stunning lack of appreciation

for the land God wanted to give them. Not only were they unwilling to go in on faith and take it, they were even unwilling to go and *look* at the whole thing.

So when the time came for the new generation to enter the land, God gave them new instructions, more in line with their own anemic expectations: **“When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries. Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea. As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border.”** (Numbers 34:1-6)

There is nothing vague about this one. God gave them everything but GPS coordinates. The southern border forms a curve dipping about twenty miles south from the Dead Sea, turning south, then west, then north, ending at the Brook of Egypt. (The Nile is nowhere close—this reference pretty much nails down the Wadi el-Arish theory.) Note that they didn’t get any land south of the Wilderness of Zin, not even to the Gulf of Aqaba. The spies’ lack of faith had cost them somewhere between 50 and 150 miles of north-to-south territory (depending on whether the Red Sea/Kenite theory is valid).

The western border is, as usual, the Mediterranean Sea. **“And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your border line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you shall mark out your border to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.”** (Numbers 34:7-9)

This is obviously not the famous Mount Hor on the border of Edom where Aaron was buried. It is rather the mountain known later as Tavros Umanis, mentioned in Song of Solomon 4:8 as Amanah. It is located near the ancient seacoast town of Byblos—slightly north of the 34th parallel, near Lebanon’s northern border, midway between Beirut and Tripoli. The entrance of Hamath is the southern end of the valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains that leads north to the present Syrian city of Hama. It’s about forty miles inland from Byblos. Zedad I take to be the town of Sadad, about the latitude of modern Tripoli, perhaps sixty miles inland. Northeast of Damascus lies a mountain called Djebel Sefira, whose name is likely derived from Ziphron. The border then moves west a bit: Hazar Enan is probably the Arab village of Dar Anon (the Arabic *Dar*, or Hebrew *Hazar*, means “dwelling;” *Anon/Enan* means “spring”), about twenty-five miles northwest of Damascus.

You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and

reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; the border shall go down along the Jordan [River], and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.” (Numbers 34:10-12)

The line continues south. Targum Jonathan identifies Shepham with Aphmia, which is Banias, about four miles east of Laish, a.k.a. Dan. Ironically, this area was traditionally reckoned as the northern tip of Israel: the idiom “from Dan to Beersheba,” meant the whole country. Beersheba, by the way, was forty or fifty miles *north* of the wilderness of Zin. The Israelites apparently believed that “less is more.”

Anyway, now we’re looking for Riblah. Ain is apparently *Ein al Malcha*, or “salt spring,” located between Kedesh and the Sea of Semechonitis, the small body of water upstream from the Sea of Galilee later known as Lake Huleh. Riblah must have been just east of this, i.e., on the northern shore of Lake Huleh. The Sea of Chinnereth, or Galilee, was included in Israel’s territory. The rest of the borderline simply follows the Jordan River south to the Dead Sea.

I realize that all of that is hard to follow without a detailed map in front of you. Basically, Numbers 34 defined Israel’s territory as all of present-day Israel (without the southern pointy part that extends from the Negev to the Gulf of Aqaba), including the West Bank and Gaza Strip (but not the Golan Heights, which *is*, however, encompassed in the Genesis 15 description), plus almost all of a Lebanon whose eastern border has been plumped up a bit to include a few miles of Syrian territory.

Obviously, these borders differ from the land area promised to Abraham, and even to those specified to Moses at the time of the exodus. Then the land was described as extending all the way from the Red Sea in the South to the Euphrates River in the north. The eastern border didn’t change as far as we can tell: It extended to the “desert” in the north, and to the Jordan River in the south, beyond which, in Moses’ day, lived the nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, whom God had expressly told the Jews not to touch. These differences are indicative of a lack of faith on the part of Israel—leading to disobedience, leading in turn to estrangement from their God and His blessings. I find it touching that God gave them one last chance to possess *all* of the land when He gave Joshua his marching orders as they were going in for the first time. All they had to do was go out in faith and “tread upon” it: **“Go over this Jordan, you [Joshua] and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites [a phrase that indicates a bigger, rather than smaller, hunk of present-day Syria], and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.”** (Joshua 1:2-4) History

shows that they did *not* “tread upon” all of it, settling for a truncated country extending from “Dan to Beersheba,” and struggling to hold even that.

It cannot be said, however, that Israel *never* held the land promised to Abraham. David’s kingdom *did* apparently extend as far north as the Euphrates, for we read, **“David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his territory at the River Euphrates.”** (II Samuel 8:3)

By the time Solomon inherited his father’s throne, he didn’t even have to fight for control of the land, though it appears that outside the secure country “from Dan to Beersheba” the lands weren’t settled exclusively by Jews, but were merely under the control of, and paying tribute to, Solomon. **“Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life... For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphseh even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.** (I Kings 4:20-21, 24-25) However, it is clear that the nation occupied at least the country specified in Numbers 34: **“At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt...”** (I Kings 8:65)

Not bad! One generation of national leadership under a king who was obedient to Yahweh and Israel’s borders got stretched to the limits of the promise—and that after 400 years of shaky and uncertain occupation under the Judges. And the next generation, enjoying “leftover” blessings, was one of the most successful kingdoms in the history of mankind. Was it too good to last? Apparently. **“In those days [Jehu’s reign] Yahweh began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael [King of Syria] conquered them in all the territory of Israel from the Jordan eastward: all the land of Gilead—Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh—from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, including Gilead and Bashan.** (II Kings 10:32-33) Within 130 years of Solomon’s death, God had removed from Israel’s control all those territories east of the Jordan that should never have been theirs in the first place—having made permanent enemies of Moab and Ammon.

The slide continued, along with the slide in Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. This verse, chronicling the time of Judah’s last king, Jehoaichin, is one of the saddest in the Bible: **“And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon [Nebuchadnezzar] had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates.”** (II Kings 24:7) Who? What? “Belonged to the King of *Egypt*?” Yep. Israel’s disobedience—both by Ephraim and Judah—had cost them their control over the land long before the Assyrians and Babylonians

actually came in and physically removed their sorry assets. Just as Moses had warned them. And warned them. And warned them.

God's personal interest in the Jews is mirrored in His personal attachment to the land, whether they're occupying it or not. His position is stated in the Law of Moses: **"The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me."** (Leviticus 25:23) This was the reason for Jubilee. According to the law, you couldn't actually buy or sell land in Israel; you could only "lease" it. Its value depended upon how many years were left until Jubilee, when everything reverted back to its original owner. This was Yahweh's way of instilling a pilgrim mentality into his people, telling them, in effect, "The Land is Mine, and the timing is Mine. For you, all of this is temporary; I am permanent. Worship Me alone."

No matter who is living there at any given time, Yahweh considers the land of promise His possession. And being His, He can give it to whomever He chooses. David stated it this way: **"He is Yahweh our God; His judgments are in all the earth. Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance..."** (I Chronicles 16:14-18; see also Psalm 105:8-11)

And there is one place, one city, within the land of Canaan that is of particular significance to Him. As He told Solomon, **"Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel. Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there; and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel."** (II Chronicles 6:5-6)

Actually, He chose the place where Jerusalem would be built long before there was a city there, long before there were any tribes of Israel. When He told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, He told him exactly where to do it: **"Go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."** (Genesis 22:2) At the time, there was no one living there—not even Jebusites. But as it turned out, Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem a mere 800 yards from the place where Abraham had prepared to make his supreme sacrifice—the very same spot where Yahweh *did* make the supreme Sacrifice two thousand years later. Yes, Jerusalem is a special place, even to God.

Offhand, I can't think of a single city other than Jerusalem that God ever chose to defend, even temporarily. But when Hezekiah's Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian armies, Yahweh promised to protect it, not because Hezekiah was a good king, not because Judah was sinless, but because of His character and His friendship with a man who had passed into history and legend over 250 years earlier. **"For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake."** (II Kings 19:34) And although Jerusalem has been leveled and rebuilt several times since then, God's eye is still upon her, for she will be Messiah's earthly capital in the coming kingdom. I can guarantee that Yahshua wasn't talking about Herod when He said, **"I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King."** (Matthew 5:34-35) He was talking about Himself!

The prophet Zechariah had a vision just before the second Temple was completed in 515 B.C. And although he lived to see the near fulfillment, he was probably unaware that God had something much more permanent, more far reaching, in view. **"Thus says Yahweh of hosts: 'I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal. I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped—but with evil intent.' Therefore thus says Yahweh: 'I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,' says Yahweh of hosts, 'and a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.... My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem.'" (Zechariah 1:12-17)**

So at the risk of getting ahead of our story, we need to consider what would happen if the nation of Israel were to repent and turn back to Yahweh—or should I say, "What *will* happen *when*..." That very thing is prophesied in dozens of places. For example: **"Yahweh will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land. The strangers will be joined with them, and they will cling to the house of Jacob. Then people will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them for servants and maids in the land of Yahweh; they will take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors."** (Isaiah 14:1-2)

This scenario admittedly doesn't look terribly likely as long as Christ—the Messiah—continues to delay His coming. But once God takes direct control of the earth's government in His own hands (remember Isaiah's words: **"the government will be upon His shoulder..."**), once the nation of Israel accepts Him as their Messiah, then He will once again **"settle them in their own land."** But what land is that? The area the U.N. carved out for Israel in 1948? The ground they were able to seize in June of 1967? The specific boundaries laid out in Numbers 34? No. I believe (SF4) that in Messiah's kingdom they will own every inch of ground Yahweh originally promised to Abram: **"...from the river of Egypt to the great river, the**

River Euphrates,” and to Moses: “from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the [Euphrates] River.”

Ownership, however, is one thing. Occupancy is another. Ezekiel, in a clearly Millennial passage, lays out the boundaries of the land that the people of Israel will occupy during the reign of Messiah. They are roughly coterminous with the Numbers 34 borders, i.e., most of modern Israel and Lebanon. **“Thus says Yahweh: ‘These are the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph shall have two portions. You shall inherit it equally with one another; for I raised My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance. This shall be the border of the land on the north: from the Great Sea, by the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad, Hamath, Berothah, Sibram (which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath), to Hazar Hatticon (which is on the border of Hauran). Thus the boundary shall be from the Sea to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus; and as for the north, northward, it is the border of Hamath. This is the north side. On the east side you shall mark out the border from between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea. This is the east side. The south side, toward the South, shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. This is the south side, toward the South. The west side shall be the Great Sea, from the southern boundary until one comes to a point opposite Hamath. This is the west side. Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance,’ says Yahweh.”** (Ezekiel 47:13-23)

Each tribe will be given an equal amount of territory, a strip of land extending all the way from the Mediterranean Sea to the eastern border of the land (the Jordan River, except in the far north), with a separate territory set aside for the Messiah, the Prince, and the Levites who are tasked with Temple service. I’ll get into the details when we discuss the Millennial reign of Christ. For now, suffice it to say that Israel has never been divided up this way, nor has it occupied precisely these borders before. The prophecy has yet to be fulfilled.

And what of the previously described land outside of these borders (that is, extending to the Euphrates in the north and to the Red Sea in the south)? Will this territory belong to Israel—and if so, how will these lands will be utilized? It is my belief (SF3) that these areas will indeed be Israeli territory, but Ezekiel makes it clear that they will not be divided up among the twelve tribes. Precisely how Yahshua will use them is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps they will be “heritage” land held in common, like our national parks.

But today, Israel is continuously pressured by its friends and enemies alike to trade its land for the promise of peace. Now that the Gaza Strip has been abandoned to Yahweh's enemies (with predictably disastrous results for all parties involved) the Muslims have once again cast a covetous eye toward the West Bank as their next target. Indeed, they have made no secret of the fact that they won't be satisfied until all of Israel is in Islamic hands and every Jew is dead. Muhammad's hallucination about riding a mythical white donkey to Jerusalem one night is their unshakable, albeit irrational, grounds for demanding total Muslim control over Yahweh's chosen city. In light of the present political situation, then, the disposition of the prophetic borders of Israel seems to be a small point. Mere survival in the face of a hostile and unrelenting *jihad* is job one. Today's Jews are not of a mind to quibble over esoteric points of ancient prophecy, even if it's theirs. But there will come a time in the not-so-distant future when the presence of Yahweh will again be real to them—as real as it was in the days of Moses—and the returning King will survey His domain anew. At that time, they will sing the anthem of the prophet recorded in Isaiah 26:12-15: **“Yahweh, You will establish peace for us, For You have also done all our works in us. O Yahweh our God, masters besides You have had dominion over us; but by You only we make mention of Your name. They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. You have increased the nation, O Yahweh, You have increased the nation; You are glorified; You have expanded all the borders of the land.”**